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SUBJECT: MARCH 13 NIGERIA AVIAN FLU UPDATE

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¶1. (U) Summary. The GON announced March 9 that an additional state, Ogun State, was confirmed positive for the H5 virus. An Ogun official said the state is investigating the outbreak at a commercial poultry facility in Akute-Oja, near the border between Lagos State and Ogun State. Southwestern Nigeria accounts for about 80% of the country's commercial poultry production. Industry officials said there is a severe glut of eggs, with prices falling 63%. Nigerians' consumption of poultry products continued to decline, while prices of fish and beef increased 20%. End summary.

Ibadan workshop on AI; efforts in the southwest

¶2. (U) The Government of Nigeria (GON) announced March 9 that an additional state, Ogun State, was confirmed positive for the H5 virus. The Agricultural Attache visited Ibadan's International Institute of Tropical Agriculture on March 9 to attend a USAID- and French Embassy-funded workshop on combating the avian influenza (AI) organized by the Ministry of Agriculture in cooperation with the Pan-African Program for the Control of Epizootics. About 350 people attended, including poultry-industry representatives, GON veterinarians, and animal scientists. The workshop provided an opportunity for southwestern state veterinarians, the poultry industry, and the GON to share strategies on carrying out emergency action plans, building capacity for veterinary services, and monitoring and surveillance. (A second, similar training session for northern Nigeria is scheduled for March 15-16 in Minna, Niger State, and is supported by USAID.)

¶3. (SBU) In a conversation with the Agricultural Attache at the margins of the meeting, an Ogun State veterinary official said that the state was investigating the AI outbreak in a commercial poultry facility in Akute-Oja, near the border between Lagos State and Ogun State. Samples had been taken for laboratory testing. If this instance was confirmed as being H5N1, this would be the first reported case in southwestern Nigeria, which accounts for almost 80% of the country's commercial poultry production. The Ogun

official said the state was carrying out active surveillance of its poultry operators.

¶4. (U) Workshop attendees said Nigeria's egg glut was compounded by the ban on cross-border exports to neighboring Benin and Togo. Prior to the outbreak of AI, Nigeria exported a substantial quantity of its eggs to Benin and Togo. The Poultry Association of Nigeria's (PAN) southwestern national vice president and the group's Oyo State chapter president both termed the egg glut severe. Farmers have been forced to drop the price of eggs from 400 naira (about USD 3.10) to 150 naira per crate of 30 -- nearly a 63% price cut. Parent-stock poultry farmers are varying their feed rations to reduce fertile egg production because of the low demand for day-old chicks.

¶5. (U) Oyo State's chief veterinarian told attendees that Oyo, to boost surveillance, was recruiting additional staff as well as providing appropriate backup logistical support. Oyo State, which is located in the southwest, was working closely with the University of Ibadan's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine to use its newly established diagnostic laboratory to screen poultry farms in the state. Oyo State has established a Technical Rapid Response Team, which will handle all reports of suspected AI cases, and its new Management Committee will examine policies that could help salvage Oyo's poultry industry.

FAS Lagos reviews effects on Nigeria's poultry industry

¶6. (U) AI has harmed significantly Nigeria's poultry

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industry since late February 2006, according to the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) in Lagos. Consumers are avoiding poultry products because of their mistaken belief that eating poultry products could kill them. As of March 8, about 500,000 birds on 126 farms in affected areas had been culled and the farms decontaminated, and an estimated 3.5 million day-old chicks worth more than 300 million naira (USD 2,325,000) were destroyed every week. Chicken processors are holding large quantities of unsold inventories and poultry farmers are not restocking because of the disease. Although the GON has begun paying compensation of 250 naira (about USD 2) per culled chicken, this amount likely is inadequate. Industry sources contend it costs 500 naira (about USD 4) to rear a chicken.

¶7. (U) The FAS forecast Nigeria's poultry production for 2006, taking into account current circumstances, at 150 million birds (about 195,000 tons), down from 155 million birds (about 200,000 tons) in 2005, with this decrease caused by AI. Total production could fall substantially in 2006 if AI remains unchecked, although poultry farmers already have taken steps to reduce stock that might remain unsold. Although reliable data on the poultry sector as a whole is limited, anecdotal industry estimates suggest that 100,000 Nigerians are engaged in commercial poultry production, either as producers, feed manufacturers, processors, or marketers. The poultry sector constitutes about 5% of Nigeria's agricultural gross domestic product, or about USD 1.3 billion.

¶8. (U) The FAS estimated Nigerians' annual per capita consumption of poultry meat at one kilogram (equivalent to about two-thirds of a chicken). Also, Nigerians' per capita egg consumption is about 20 eggs per year. Nigeria's overall poultry-meat consumption in 2005 was roughly 220,000 metric tons (MT), while current output from Nigeria's family poultry system accounts for as much as 110,000 MT of this amount, with commercially reared birds adding 90,000 MT. The remaining 20,000 MT are smuggled into Nigeria, in defiance of the government's ban on poultry imports. Chickens make up the lion's share of all poultry consumed in Nigeria, followed by turkeys, ducks, and guinea fowl.

¶9. (U) Nigerian fast-food restaurant operators reported a 60% decline in chicken sales since AI's appearance, according to the agricultural attache. The country's fast-food operators, whose main ingredient is chicken, have cut back their operations significantly or switched to serving fish and beef. Fish and beef, however, are growing increasingly scarce, as their prices reportedly have risen 20%.

¶10. (U) Although the UN Food and Agriculture Organization recommends vaccination as a tool the GON should use to control AI, the GON still strongly opposes bird inoculations because of the poultry industry's fragmented nature. Industry contacts reported that some large poultry operators already are vaccinating their birds, despite the government's calls against this. The GON is supposed to announce by March 17 its policy on bird vaccinations.

¶11. (SBU) The GON's response to date has focused on arresting the spread of AI in and near urban areas, the Agricultural Attache reported, while small rural poultry farmers remain unaware of the virus. Nigeria currently has no designated centers with adequate resources where farmers can lodge reports of suspected AI cases, especially at the state- and local-government levels. The Nigerian public remains inadequately informed about AI and how to deal with it. There is no clear understanding by local farmers of measures the government is taking to contain AI's spread, while the GON's ban on poultry movements between Nigerian states continued not to be enforced.
CAMPBELL